

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL

Voting Members present: Chairman Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Councilor Joanne Campbell, Councilor Joseph Demers, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Charles Viola, Councilor Richard Gately, Councilor Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Lou DiMambro, and President Michael Concannon

Also present: Mayor Scott Galvin, Treasurer/Collector Timothy Donovan, Auditor Charles Doherty, Board of Assessors Chairman Robert Maguire, Asst. Assessor Jane Ventresca, Supt. of Schools Dr. Matthew Crowley, Asst. Superintendent for Finance & Operations Robert Alconada, School Committee Chairman Dr. John Wells, and School Committee members Patricia Chisholm, Colleen Cormier, Ellen Crowley, and Andrew Lipsett, Cemetery Commission Chairman John Sawyer and DPW Deputy Supt. Leonard Burnham

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Communication and order regarding the transfer of funds from City of Woburn Surplus Overlay Account to three (3) assessing activities for FY2023 recertification by the Mass.

DOR: Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Dillon to receive and place on file the following documents from Auditor Doherty: "City of Woburn Financial Information;" and "GASB Statements Nos. 74 and 75 Report for Fiscal Year 2021 City of Woburn." Mayor Galvin said the city sets aside money in an overlay surplus account for potential tax abatements. He said any money that does not go toward tax abatements is released on Feb. 1. He said two of the transfers will go toward the Assessors Dept.'s 5-year revaluation. He said the last revaluation was done was 2018. He said the third transfer is for litigation services. Motion made by President Concannon and seconded by Councilor Dillon that the transfer "ought to pass;" approved, 9-0.

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Communication and order to appropriate the sum of \$1,000,000 from Unreserved Fund Balance to SPED Stabilization Fund:

Mayor Galvin said a two-thirds vote from the City Council is required for approval of this appropriation. He said there is a request from the School Dept. to pay for out-of-district special education costs, which he said can be unpredictable. He said the administration has been working with Supt. Crowley, School Committee member Ellen Crowley, and School Committee Chair Wells to define the parameters of the SPED stabilization fund. Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the council has appropriated money for special education in the past and asked if the mayor is comfortable with the \$1 million number. Councilor Gately asked if all the special education money from last year has been spent. Mayor Galvin said the School Committee returned to the city some special education money from last year. Councilor Gately said he is all for special education but he wants to make sure any unexpended funds are

returned. He asked if there are any new out-of-district special education students entering the school system. Mayor Galvin said there are no new out-of-district special education students he is aware of, but if one of two enter, then the city should have some money set aside. Motion made by President Concannon and seconded by Councilor Demers that the appropriation “ought to pass;” approved, 9-0.

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Communication and order to appropriate the sum of \$10,000,000 from Unreserved Fund Balance to General Stabilization Fund: Mayor Galvin said Treasurer/Collector Donovan can explain some of the specifics, but the general idea of the transfer is to give the city a greater array of investment options. He said there is a wider berth for investment from money that is in a stabilization fund. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said there are investment limitations with money in the general fund. He said allocating money to a stabilization fund gives the city more options and better returns. He said bank interest rates are currently 0.1 percent, and he does not expect that rate to increase soon. He said the city isn’t really getting any interest revenue at all from the banks. He said all the investments with money from the stabilization fund will be with solid companies that do not have a lot of risk. He said the dividend could be as much as 2.5 percent. He said the city’s financial team feels like this is a good move. He said the city is required by state law to use any funds into better investments. Chairman Mercer-Bruen said one of the things that sets Woburn apart from other communities is its financial management. Motion made by Councilor Gately and seconded by Councilor Demers that the appropriation “ought to pass;” approved, 9-0.

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Order to appropriate the sum of \$28,000.00 from Cemetery Interest Fund to Various Accounts: Chairman Sawyer said the Cemetery Commission is requesting appropriation of \$28,000 to four accounts to cover expenses for the rest of the fiscal year. He said since the transition of the Cemetery Dept. to the Dept. of Public Works, DPW Supt. John Duran and Deputy Supt. Burnham have determined there is some equipment that needs to be replaced. He said there have also been some big expenditures for tree work. Motion made by Councilor Gately and seconded by Councilor Dillon that the appropriation “ought to pass,” approved, 9-0.

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MOTION made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Dillon to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the meeting of October 12, 2021, and to approve; all in favor, 9-0.

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Budget update with representatives from the School Dept.: Chairman Wells said Supt. Crowley will be providing an update to the City Council. Chairman Wells said school officials were accustomed to providing updates prior to the onset of the pandemic. He said Member Chisholm is the chairman of the School Committee’s Finance Subcommittee. Supt. Crowley

submitted a handout to the committee. Motion made by Councilor Dillon and seconded by Councilor Demers to receive and place on file a document entitled “Woburn Public Schools 2018-Present;” approved, 9-0. Supt. Crowley said the School Dept. is in the process of updating the strategic plan. He said the original strategic plan was adopted in 2018. He said the support from the community made this possible. He said the School Dept. is going to solicit input from a variety of stakeholder groups. He said he thinks the first strategic plan was successful. He said it is not easy undertaking a task like this during a pandemic. He said Woburn has a complex school district. He said more adjustment counselors have been added at the elementary level. He said never have adjustment counselors been needed more. He said music and art curricula were added on a weekly basis. He said the WIN Block program was added at the elementary level without any additional funding. He said he is proud of that work. Supt. Crowley said 1:1 Chromebooks were dispersed at the middle school level. He said without support from the city, that would not have been possible. He said music, art and curriculum support have been expanded at the middle school level. Dr. Crowley said at the high school level, some students are working in the elementary schools. He said the Bryt Program at the high school has been a success. He said there is a greater emphasis on supporting mental health issues. He said the need for special education has not decreased. He said an investment has been made by the city. Supt. Crowley said the administration has partnered with the library. He said the School Dept. added a Human Resources Director, and they are very grateful to have that. He said they opened a new Hurld/Wyman Elementary School. He said they have been busy, with all of this work coming in the midst of a pandemic. He said nevertheless the city’s MCAS scores outperformed the state average. He said he is really, really proud of where the School Dept. is. Asst. Supt. Alconada said the School Dept. has provided Chromebooks to students on a 1:1 basis. He said air purifiers have been installed in classrooms are part of overall measures to mitigate the spread of Covid. He said rapid antigen tests have been provided for staff. He thanked the Finance Committee for supporting the special education fund. He said he does not foresee dipping into the SPED fund during the current fiscal year, but it will be a nice safety net. He said the School Dept. obtained a series of grants to target learning loss as the result of the pandemic. He said the grants also cover summer enrichment programs and transportation. He said there was a \$1.2 million expenditure on new curricula, which he said is being implemented now. He said this is a generational purchase. He said the School Dept.’s budget is in good order for the current fiscal year. He said School Dept. officials meet with Mayor Galvin and Auditor Doherty on a weekly basis. He said there are some line items that are running high, but he said overall he likes to think the School Dept. exercises strong fiscal responsibility. He said one of the challenges going forward will be negotiating labor contract with seven different collective bargaining units. He said the school community is grateful for the 1:1 technology component but added it needs to be maintained. He said school staff has been working with the IT director to make sure the infrastructure is maintained. He said there has been a large increase in the number of students who do not speak English as their primary language. He said they are looking at ways to help them learn better. He said he is hopeful the end of the pandemic is near. He said the School Dept. will have to make sure it has the ability to maintain services. Councilor Campbell said it will be a challenge to negotiate with seven different collective bargaining units. She asked about the amounts and the continuity of the grants that were referenced by Asst. Supt. Alconada. Asst. Supt. Alconada replied the Esser grants will end. Councilor Campbell asked about the amounts of those grants. Asst. Supt. Alconada said the department received a \$500,000 grant in FY ’21, has a \$1.9 million grant in FY ’22 and a \$1.5 million grant in FY ’23, which he said may carry over to FY ’24.

Councilor Campbell asked if that is money that will have to be replenished. Asst. Supt. Alconada said the Esser grants are designed to cover 1-time expenses related to PPE or Covid. He said the School Dept. will have to develop a strategy to cover those costs in the budget once the Esser grants end. Councilor Campbell said the School Dept. has done remarkably well with budgeting. She said the School Dept. uses every dime it is allotted in an effective way. She said she is so impressed that the School Dept. was able to maintain art and music as part of the curriculum. She said she thinks that is so wonderful for the children. Asst. Supt. Alconada thanked Councilor Campbell for her comments and said it is a team effort to educate students. Chairman Mercer-Bruen thanked the school representatives for their hard work. She said there has not been a meeting like this for the past couple of years due to Covid, and she is looking forward to regular updates every six months. She said any movement toward normalcy is important. She said these updates are important. She thanked school officials for providing such a thorough update.

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MOTION made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Dillon to adjourn; approved, 9-0. Chairman Mercer-Bruen adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees